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**The Monitor's view**

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## Can the Russians cheat?

It would be a pity if the whole public debate over the upcoming SALT treaty reduced to the issue of verification. Many Senate critics now are latching onto this issue as the easiest to attack. The American public is thrown off by esoteric arguments about throw-weight and multiple reentry vehicles but it understands well the simple question: Can the Russians cheat or not? If treaty opponents hammer away at the question of Soviet compliance, they are more likely to have an appealing cause.

We would not minimize the importance of verification. CIA director Stansfield Turner's testimony to the Senate that it will take several years for the United States to restore its intelligence capability following the loss of monitoring sites in Iran is disappointing news. But it might be pointed out that he was careful not to make any overall judgment on the SALT verification issue. Moreover, it is hard for the administration to defend itself on this question because this would mean making public raw intelligence data and exposing its intelligence-gathering methods. This is not an area of easy public discussion.

Looking at past history, however, the public can be assured that the Russians have not been found guilty of major violations of arms accords. It is true that they have taken advantage of technical loopholes in SALT I to bolster

their own defenses. But this is not deemed the same as violations. And in cases where the US has felt Soviet actions violated the spirit of the pact by exploiting loopholes, it has asked the Russians to draw back and they have done so. Certainly the Senate, in taking up SALT II, will have to screen the treaty to make sure no loopholes exist.

In the final analysis, it comes down to a matter of Soviet national interest. Perhaps the United States will not be able to guarantee total compliance with the treaty but, given improved satellite reconnaissance, it will catch any major violations. In such case, the Soviet Union would lose credibility in the arms negotiations, the whole structure of détente would come tumbling down, and Soviet-American relations would revert to a new cold war. Is that a risk Moscow would bear?

Our main point, however, is that verification is but one facet of SALT II. The question senators and all Americans must address is whether the pact will enhance strategic arms stability; whether it will reverse the nuclear arms race, and whether it will preserve America's ability to defend itself and its allies. Also, what the consequences will be — in economic cost and political instability — if a SALT agreement is not adopted.

These are the central issues which ought to lie at the heart of the public debate.